

VZCZCXRO5344
PP RUEHRN
DE RUEHMR #0149/01 0731609
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P R 141609Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2749
INFO RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3100
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000149

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FOR AF/S

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/14/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: LESOTHO'S NEW FOREIGN MINISTER PRAISES BILATERAL
RELATIONSHIP

REF: (A) STATE 21535 (B) STATE 19372 (C) STATE 9932

MASERU 00000149 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: June Carter Perry, Ambassador, EXEC , STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

CLASSIFIED BY: June Carter Perry, Ambassador, EXEC , STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

11. (C) In her first official courtesy call on the "new" Foreign Minister (FOMIN) Mhlabi Kenneth Tsekoa March 14, Ambassador Perry congratulated him on his return to the posting. The Minister graciously accepted the Ambassador's congratulations and remembered our first meeting in 2004 when he actually was Minister of Foreign Affairs before being detailed to the Ministry of Education. The conversation covered our major bilateral activities, including the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) as well as the results of the recent 2007 National Election in Lesotho. The Foreign Minister made a special plea for continued donor support in the area of education and acknowledged that it was important that the re-elected Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) party do a better job of reaching out to people and in delivering services to them. The Ambassador shared Senator Richard Lugar's recent resolution recognizing Lesotho for its forward movement on gender equity and sought the FOMIN's position on a number of matters including the Human Rights Council, the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, and the status of U.S. relations with Iran. The Minister was supportive on all bilateral issues and stated he would hand deliver a copy of the Lugar Resolution to the Prime Minister himself within the next 30 minutes. We believe that Tsekoa's appointment is a positive step in the re-constituted government of Lesotho and that the success of the opposition All Basotho Convention (ABC) party in certain rural areas was a wakeup call to the LCD that service delivery to the poor must be a keystone of their new policy. End Summary.

12. (C) Foreign Minister Tsekoa expressed his delight at seeing the U.S. Ambassador again in his restored capacity as Foreign Minister and recalled that he indeed had been the first government official met by the Ambassador upon her arrival three years ago. He went on to expound on the special appreciation the Government of Lesotho (GOL) had for efforts undertaken by the U.S. Embassy in the areas of health, education and business

development. As Chairman of Lesotho's MCA Interministerial Committee, Tsekoa alluded to his first chairing of that committee last week and his commitment to completing all the requirements by June of this year in hopes that the compact would be signed by that time. The Ambassador responded that indeed the various elements of the MCA had included near constant on-the-ground presence of various MCC personnel and consultants. She went on to explain, in response to the Minister's query, that in addition to MCC personnel, other new additional personnel such as Centers for Disease Control (CDC) staff would also be housed on the Chancery's compound. Tsekoa remembered that when USAID had a large presence in country, it too had been situated within the Embassy and he felt that this was indeed a strong sign of U.S. interest in Lesotho's development.

13. (C) The Ambassador brought to the Minister's attention their conversations when he served as Minister of Education and his special interest in the Ambassador's Girls Scholarship Program (AGSP) and Book Donation programs. Tsekoa reiterated that interest in education as the only path for success for Lesotho and requested that the Embassy continue and indeed enhance the book and literacy program. We assured him that this remained one of our key priorities, because a well educated work force would indeed be the basis for Lesotho's forward movement. We also indicated, after the Minister brought up the issue of unemployed youth, that at a certain period in the history of the United States, the government had developed special work programs that included youth. Tsekoa emphasized that the government knew it must do something to get the unemployed youth off the streets of Maseru and that perhaps the U.S. model could be one Lesotho could follow or model as needed. He added that he planned to take the new Minister of Public Works and Transport Tsele Chakela to the highland areas; he referred to the Minister as a lowlander who did not have a true realization of the difficulties faced by people in rural areas of the country. We urged the Foreign Minister to also, in his role as the ranking Cabinet member, increase public outreach to the ordinary citizens of Lesotho. This she indicated was

MASERU 00000149 002.2 OF 002

particularly important, given the issues of security and perceptions of corruption (e.g. the leased car scandal) in order to demonstrate the government's abiding interest in democracy and development of each individual. Tsekoa responded that he was in absolute agreement and that his own LCD party had learned a lesson from the 2007 elections, and that was that they must, in order to succeed, be a more open and service delivery oriented government.

14. (C) Moving on to more pending international matters, the Ambassador explained the importance of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and requested Lesotho's support of this measure, particularly in the area of providing a safehaven to terrorists and financial or economical resources to them. Tsekoa stated that it was absolutely imperative that safety and

SIPDIS

security be the GOL's number one priority. There could be no growth or development without it. As leader of the Southern African Development Committee (SADC), the GOL strongly backed this initiative. The Ambassador took this opportunity to follow up on our previous request with former Foreign Minister Moleleki concerning African Group Candidacy for the Human Rights Council seat. As Tsekoa was just taking office, he said he would indeed review material and background on the Human Rights Council and respond to the Ambassador in terms of Lesotho's final position as a potential candidate. Regarding Iran, before the Ambassador could address key points, the Foreign Minister stated that Iran poses a threat to the entire world and he had noticed the increased interest of the U.S. and the Secretary of State's recent actions to address the Iranian nuclear issue. We reviewed the key points on Iran having indicated that we considered the unanimous vote on UNSCR 1737 as a good example of international unity and that we intended to continue our outreach to the Iranian people.

Comment

15. (C) We are pleased that Foreign Minister Tsekoa (a seasoned diplomat and Amherst College graduate) has been reappointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. As evidenced by his comments, it is clear that he recognizes the challenges that lie before the LCD in terms of more forceful and effective communications with the Basotho people, more emphasis on economic development in both rural and urban areas, and the need for quick action to deter security threats posed frequently by the large number of unemployed youth. Tsekoa and his team, which included the Acting Principal Secretary as well as the Americas Desk Officer, praised the Ambassador for the increased overall U.S. Mission staff and personnel in support of Lesotho's development goals. We believe that as a close friend of the Prime Minister, Tsekoa will be able to assist us now that major programs have been launched to maintain and strengthen these programs in the coming years. As we have noted in previous cables, Tsekoa had suffered a serious medical condition which was essentially the basis for his transfer to the Ministry of Education at the end of 2004. He has made considerable progress and has told Ambassador in private that his chemotherapy has been very effective and that his cancer is in remission. We hope this continues to be the case given the very important role he plays in both the stability of the country and in advancing U.S. - GOL relations. End Comment.

PERRY